

Home About Us Church Growth Directory Leadership Ministry New Church News TAP Donate



## News

Breaking News

Feature Focus

Celebrate

Conference News

Local Church News

Lifting Up...

NEWS Archives

Upcoming Events

SEC News Resources

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## *An Easter Story of Redemption*

Dear Friends,

It would seem a little odd that I would begin a reflection on our journey through Lent into the glory of the Easter promise in Christ with the statement: "for the first time in over forty years I did not spend Easter morning in church". You might wonder about my faith or lack thereof. But there is, of course, a story. It begins with a family gathering on Easter weekend in Massachusetts to celebrate the life of one of my wife, Carol's, aunts who had died recently, and to at the same time lift up the story of a remarkable family. It is the story of a Jewish family, the seven Rubin brothers and their sister, set in a Nazi occupied Vienna in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Not one of the brothers or their sister, their spouses or their children, died in the Holocaust. Around them millions disappeared into the shadows of a sinister machine of systematic genocide. On Easter morning I was with the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of these eight siblings and listened to their stories.

On Easter we arrive at the empty tomb having sojourned in the shadows of Lent. We have traversed a season of reflection, penitence; some of us may have undertaken spiritual disciplines of fasting or prayer for the season, a season of preparation. Then we come to the dawn of Easter morning, at first standing with the women at the tomb, confused and uncertain, why is the stone rolled away? Where have they taken him? But as the truth of the resurrection comes into focus, we sing, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? Death where is your sting? Thanks are to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" The story of our faith is a story of redemption over despair, or as Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote: "We proclaim

that the power of life is stronger than the grip of death, that the rising of faith can eclipse the shadow of disbelief, that love will conquer hate, and justice break the hold of evil and that grace will always triumph over judgment, and hope over despair".

The descendants of the Rubin family gathered on Easter morning was a story of redemption. I listened to stories of children who left their parents for far off places, not knowing if they would ever see them again. Some were boarded onto a "Kinder Train", taking them to England from where they would be sent to the United States. One woman told me that she, at age eleven was taken to the train by her father, and told "if you need to urinate, do so standing in place, and do not look down. If you ask for a bathroom they will take you away." She added, "The guard came through the line, and took every fourth or fifth child away, and then we heard gun shots. She described how, once on the train, a Nazi guard challenged a boy asking him what was in the case he was carrying. He said, "My violin". The guard said, "Take it out and play it for me. If you cannot play it, I will shoot you right here." He played it beautifully. Others came to the United States at the age of 16 or 17, and were taken in by families they did not

## UCC News

### UCC Newsroom

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

WCM executive calls for 'complete withdrawal' of Ugandan anti-gay legislation

The Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, the UCC's executive minister for Wider Church Ministries, issued a statement today (May 11) calling for the Ugandan government to drop legislation that calls for the imprisonment of homosexuals.



## Southeast Conference FAQ's

Who is the SEC?

Who is the UCC?

How Do I Find a UCC Church?

What Ministries are Available?

Is Training Available?

the United States at the age of 16 or 17, and were taken in by families they did not know.

The parents escaped by a number of routes, one of the safest but most arduous was across the Soviet Union on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, then a ship to Japan, and then to the United States. One of the brothers in New York, Uncle Joe, was the one who resolved that every member of the family would live, and worked to see that this would happen. And so they did...everyone.

While I was not in church on Easter morning, I was surrounded by an Easter story, and there were perhaps 35 people to give testimony with their lives that it was an Easter story, a story of redemption and hope. And as with all Easter stories, we know that this story is just the beginning. Many others had died where they had lived. The living of the continuing Easter story is now passed to each of us, and we proclaim that the "power of life is stronger than the grip of death, and love will conquer hate, o death where is your victory?"

Peace,

**Tim Downs**  
*Conference Minister*

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| <a href="#">A Word From Tim Downs - April</a>        | <a href="#">General Synod 2011</a>             |

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SECUCC RESOURCES

- Annual Meeting
- Global Theological Education
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- SEC Churches
- Seminars/Webinars

FAVORITE LINKS

- Bridge 4 Faith
- The Center for Progressive Renewal
- United Church of Christ
- Mission Insite
- Resource Center

EVENTS CALENDAR

| May 2011 |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| S        | M  | T  | W  | T  | F  | S  |
| 1        | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  |
| 8        | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15       | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22       | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29       | 30 | 31 | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  |

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